

South Kitsap schools recognized for pest management excellence

So, how does a school district get selected to serve as the role model for pest management?

It helps to have an administration that is committed to conducting least-toxic pest control measures on school campuses. This type of leadership has made South Kitsap School District a model and only the second recipient in the western United States of the IPM, or Integrated Pest Management, STAR Certification. This award, originated by Dr. Thomas A. Green with the IPM Institute of North America, was presented to the South Kitsap School Board at a March 7, 2005 ceremony.

To be an IPM STAR recipient, schools must demonstrate the following:

- Knowledge of IPM principles
- Continued inspections for pests
- Action steps only when necessary
- Evaluation and use of all pest management options
- Effective pest management
- Documentation of results
- Continuous improvement
- Communication and outreach
- Reduction in health and environmental risk

The IPM program has its beginnings with Jim Beveridge, former grounds department manager. In the past few years, Mike Riley, the current grounds and maintenance department manager, has been the sparkplug for getting the program off the ground. Riley, now the IPM coordinator dealing with day-to-day execution of the program, explains, “Our priority has always been to keep pesticides away from kids.”

During the last six years, Eden Advanced Pest Technologies has provided services to the district and helped rid schools of the occasional mouse as well as carpenter ants and termites. The district manages other pests on school grounds – primarily weeds and stinging insects – with in-house staff, and contractors as needed.

“Head custodians will call me if there is a problem,” Riley says. “If the problem isn’t urgent, they’ll enter the request into our electronic work order system. By evaluating pest problems as they come up, we decide if it’s something we can handle ourselves, or if funds need to be spent to bring in an outside contractor.”

Cost is not the only factor working to limit pesticide applications at South Kitsap. Washington state law now requires school districts to contact parents who want to be notified prior to the application of a pesticide. South Kitsap goes above and beyond the requirement, notifying all parents and staff.

“We feel that the risk involved in missing someone who wanted to be notified isn’t worth it – so we notify everyone,” says Tom O’Brien, facilities director. “It’s burdensome to let everyone know, so we consider every potential pesticide application carefully and look for alternatives.”

Riley makes sure every pest event becomes an opportunity for learning. A recent case in point involved a trail of ants entering a classroom seeking food.

“We showed the teacher how to clean up the food source and the ant trail using a sponge and cleaner,” relates Riley. “The head custodian followed the trail outdoors, and cleaned it up there. By removing the ‘odor trail’ that ants lay down to recruit other ants, we put a stop to the problem without using pesticide.”

Within the past decade, the district took another safety step and made a “clean sweep” of school facilities for unauthorized pesticides. The cleanout netted a haul that included sprays for head lice.

“Not everyone was happy with losing their pesticides,” says Riley of the cleanup, “but we’ve continued to get good control of pests with other measures. One of the things we’ve done is to develop a higher tolerance for weeds in less visible areas.”

IPM expert Carrie Foss from Washington State University and WSDA’s Dr. Dan Suomi worked with the district to refine its pest control program with the goal of exporting IPM to other state schools. The Department of Agriculture’s recordkeeping database, developed specifically for tracking school pesticide applications, had room for improvement. So, Suomi developed the school database project. In fact, WSDA’s pest control specialist worked with a software developer to make the program available statewide. Anywhere in the state today, school employees responsible for recording pesticide applications can easily download the database from the department’s Web site. Currently the program is being used by numerous schools in Washington; other states have also expressed an interest in using it.

Deborah Anderson, secretary to director O’Brien, then worked closely with Suomi to make additional improvements in the database. According to Anderson, “The database is great for keeping track of (our actions) when a pest problem is reported; we note if a pesticide was applied or if a non-chemical method solved the problem.”

The database resource will help South Kitsap accurately measure their IPM program and exactly how it pays off to reduce the district’s reliance on pesticides. If motivation and commitment serve as a gauge, WSDA expects to see even more progress at South Kitsap schools in the future.



In March, WSDA pesticide management staff presented the South Kitsap School Board in Port Orchard with a STAR Certification award. From left to right: Dan Suomi, PCO Specialist, WSDA; Carrie Foss, IPM Coordinator, WSU; Board President Jim Huff, Facilities Director Tom O'Brien, Deborah Anderson, Don Fike, Mike Riley all with the South Kitsap School District.